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The situation in the Middle East

Question of Palestine

Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

Letter dated 19 June 2000 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Upon instructions, I wish to draw your attention to comments made recently by a high-ranking Israeli official, threatening the use of extreme force against the Palestinian people. The comments made, which have been attributed to Israel's army chief of staff, Shaul Mofaz, are reflective of a recent pattern of threats being made by Israeli officials, including high-ranking military officers.

Addressing Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip, Mr. Mofaz, referring to the potential for unrest and violent protests in the Palestinian territories in the future should a peace settlement remain elusive, stated the following: "The open fire instructions are clear. And if we need tanks, tanks will come. And if we need combat helicopters, combat helicopters will come." This statement was confirmed by the army and, moreover, was considered at an Israeli security cabinet meeting on 18 June 2000, resulting in something akin to endorsement of that statement.

Undoubtedly, such statements are not only inconsistent with the peace process, but also serve to increase tension between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. The Israeli side has engaged in repeated threats of force and violence against the Palestinian people in response to their protestations in defence of their legitimate and inalienable rights. Such threats of extreme force cannot be taken lightly, as the fragile and tense situation in the area could quickly destabilize and words could be quickly translated into action. Moreover, international law prohibits the threat or the use of such force. As such, the Palestinian leadership views such comments and threats with the utmost seriousness.

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These recent comments come in addition to the ongoing Israeli refusal to comply with existing agreements, including the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum of 4 September 1999, which gives priority to permanent status negotiations and commits the parties to reaching a final and comprehensive agreement by September 2000. It is regrettable that, due to such Israeli actions and comments, both the situation on the ground and the peace process have deteriorated, with peace process negotiations in specific being held in an increasingly difficult and negative setting.

Clearly Israeli words and actions have prevented real progress in the peace process and contributed to the crisis atmosphere that is rapidly evolving in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. While the Palestinian side remains committed to the peace process and to resolving outstanding differences with the Israeli side at the negotiating table, the Palestinian leadership cannot accept that such threats are directed against its people. The international community as well should not accept such threats of force, and should exert all efforts to promote adherence to international law and norms and to promote a peaceful settlement between the two sides.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of this letter distributed as an official document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 43, 44 and 89, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Somaia **Barghouti**
Chargé d'affaires a.i.